DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 570 CS 216 087

AUTHOR Davis, Wes; Fulton, Joe
TITLE The Effects of Professors' Feedback on the Growth of Students' Overall Writing Quality in Two College Freshman English Courses.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 28p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Analysis of Variance; *College English; College Freshmen; Comparative Analysis; *Feedback; *Freshman Composition; Higher Education; Student Development; Teaching Methods; Writing Evaluation; *Writing Improvement; *Writing Processes; Writing Research; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Writing Quality

ABSTRACT

A comparative study examined the extent of growth in overall writing quality of college freshmen to determine whether feedback from the instructor during planning and the composing process (especially on the computer) was more effective than another instructor's feedback during conferences on each final, graded writing product in the students' outcomes. Subjects were 40 college freshmen, 20 in each comparison group. The study used a qualitative, pretest/posttest quasi-experimental design, with statistical analysis of variance (ANOVA). Results indicated that the students' growth in overall writing quality, between their pretest and posttest essays, was statistically significant for both comparison groups of writers. However, there was no significant difference between the two comparison groups in terms of the students' posttest outcomes in overall writing quality, although the group of students receiving feedback during their planning and composing did show slightly more growth in writing than did students receiving feedback after each of their essays had been graded. Findings suggest that both professors' personal feedback on their students' writing, combined with these instructors' methods for teaching freshman composition, made a statistically significant difference in their students' growth in their overall writing quality. (Contains 15 references; a description of essay scoring procedure is appended.) (Author/CR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 414 570

The Effects of Professors' Feedback on the Growth of Students' Overall Writing Quality in Two College Freshman English Courses

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

W. Davis

1

Wes Davis, Ph.D.
Joe Fulton, Ph.D.
Division of Humanities
Dalton College
213 N. College Drive
Dalton, Georgia 30720
Phone: (706) 272-4499

CS216057

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This article reports the results and educational implications of a comparative study conducted in two college freshman composition courses. This study evaluated the extent of growth in overall writing quality of 40 college freshmen, 20 students in each comparison group, to determine whether feedback from the instructor during planning and the composing process, especially on the computer, was more effective than another instructor's feedback during conferences on each final, graded writing product in the students' outcomes. This study used a quantitative, pretest/post-test quasi-experimental design, with statistical Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to find answers for this inquiry.

The students' growth in overall writing quality, between their pretest and post-test essays, was statistically significant for both comparison groups of college freshman writers. However, there was no significant difference between the two comparison groups in terms of the students' post-test outcomes in overall writing quality, although the group of students receiving feedback during their planning and composing did show slightly more growth in writing than did the students receiving feedback after each of their essays had been graded.

These findings suggest that both professors' personal feedback on their students' writing, combined with these instructors' methods for teaching freshman composition, made a statistically significant difference in their students' growth

on their overall writing quality. Perhaps each professor's personal intervention, whether it was before, during or after the students' composing processes, helped the students improve their skills and grow significantly in their overall writing quality.

In college freshman composition, pedagogical approaches differ widely, especially concerning when students should receive feedback on their writing from the instructor. These methods range from "product-centered feedback, in which the teacher conferences with the student after the written product has been graded, to process-based feedback, in which the teacher intervenes during each student's planning and composing processes before the final product is submitted and graded.

While some recent studies have examined the question of how effective feedback is on students' writing quality, no study has examined how improved student writing correlates with different instructors' styles and timing for giving feedback in the composing process. In this study, the researchers did attempt to determine whether feedback during the pre-writing (planning) and writing process was more effective than feedback during the post-writing phase of the final, graded product on the growth and outcomes in writing quality for two classes of 40 college freshmen.

Two assistant professors of English taught one class each, using a combination of the traditional essay forms, with instruction in grammar skills, and the contemporary composing-process model. However, each professor used a different approach of giving feedback on writing in his respective class of 20 students for each comparison group: One gave feedback during planning and composing the product; the other gave feedback after the written product had been graded. This study used a quantitative, pretest/post-test, quasi-experimental design with

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

statistical Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to assess these important variables in teaching composition.

Review of Related Literature

For nearly 20 years, researchers have studied the effects of instructors' feedback from writing conferences on the quality of college students' essays. Recently, Patthey-Chavez and Ferris (1997) designed a study to trace the effects of teacher conferences on subsequent student efforts in writing. They stated:

> Responding to student writing is an integral aspect of composition teaching. Researchers have examined both teachers' response to student writing and one-to-one teacher-student writing conferences as important sources of teacher feedback and instruction for developing student writers. . . However, previous research on teacher-student writing conferences has had two important limitations: 1) Researchers have rarely linked their analyses of the conferences to subsequent student writing in any systematic way, making it difficult to evaluate the effects of the conferences; and 2)researchers have often not considered adequately either the larger contexts in which students were operating, including institutional expectations of both students and teachers, or individual differences in ability, language, or culture among students. (P. 51)

Patthey-Chavez and Ferris' study was designed to address both of these limitations. Their results showed that the effects of

writing conferences on students' revisions and subsequent writing helped them improve their drafts to a "passing" quality of "more acceptable academic discourse" (p. 83).

Hillocks (1986), in his meta-analysis of instructional modes in composition, reported:" The major assumption underlying most treatments categorized as belonging to the individualized mode [of instruction] is that a teacher working with a single student is more effective than a teacher working with a whole class" (p. 128). Some of Hillocks' other instructional modes were the "natural process" and the "environmental" method, the latter of which was the most effective approach for teaching composition in his meta-analysis; both of these modes may include the "individualized" approach as well, providing feedback during one-to-one conferences on writing from both teachers and peers before producing a final draft. Stein (1984) has suggested that a major reason for the success of this "environmental approach" may be its increased opportunities for feedback.

In some studies (Beach, 1979; Clifford, 1981; Hillocks, 1982), feedback from the teacher produced significant gains in the students' writing quality. Also, in an exploratory study of students' reactions to teachers' comments as feedback, Straub (1997) reported that students mostly preferred helpful criticism as feedback for improving their writing.

Hillocks (1986) further concluded in his meta-analysis that feedback tied to pre-writing or revision did increase the quality of writing by helping students meet certain goals in composition. Ironically, however, Hillocks claimed that, overall, the research

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

reported in his review (1986) suggested that feedback had very little effect on enhancing the quality of students' writing. Finally, Hillocks wrote:

> Another tradition in the teaching of writing emphasizes ... instruction after students have written something. That is, students write and then receive comments from teachers or peers about what was effective or ineffective. These comments constitute instruction which is presumed to help students become more effective in their next writing. This feedback is sometimes coupled with revision and sometimes not. Observations suggest that in some American classrooms instruction is predominantly of the post-writing type, with little or no prewriting instruction outside of the teacher's finding and assigning a topic (A. Applebee 1981)... Most treatments included in [this] meta-analysis which include feedback and revision also include some focus of instruction prior to writing. (pp. 218-219)

In this present study, the researchers did attempt to determine what impact the timing of differing feedback styles had on the growth and outcomes of the students' overall writing quality between the two comparison groups.

Design and Procedures

This study was a quantitative, statistical analysis assessing the effects of instructor feedback on college freshmen's writing before, during, and after their composing processes. The purpose of this study was to discover any

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

statistically significant differences in the writing growth and outcomes of 40 students, 20 subjects in each comparison group, between their pretest and post-test essays. The design and methodology for obtaining and analyzing the data placed specific limitations on the variables, research instruments, the population of subjects sampled, and the procedure in the study.

For the instructional modes of the two college professors, the teaching methods for one professor were characterized in the following ways: (1) correctness in the students' writing by teaching rules of grammar and mechanics in standard written English, using a college handbook and companion workbook; (2) the heavy use of essay models from previous students; (3) instruction in the rhetorical modes of discourse (narration, description, exposition, argumentation); (4) the methods of development or patterns of organization in exposition applied to writing assignments; (5) students' engagement in a limited writing process, with 50 minutes to plan and outline the five-paragraph essay, 60 minutes to compose and edit a draft before the initial grading of the essay and, after the initial grading, an additional 50 minutes to revise, edit, and correct an essay for a slightly higher grade average on the writing assignment; (6) first four of the ten essays composed and revised on the computer word processor, remaining six essays handwritten; (7) the professor intervening with feedback during each student's planning and composing process, especially on the computer, to answer any questions before the essay product was completed and submitted for a grade.

The teaching methods of the other college professor were characterized in the following ways: (1) the professor providing feedback on the student's writing during conferences after each student's essay had been graded; (2) group work; (3) a blend of composing process and product; (4) short ten-minute lectures or presentations followed by the application of the material discussed; (5) writing models from a college reader; (6) grammar exercises from a college handbook; (7) instruction in the rhetorical modes of discourse (narration, description, exposition, and argumentation); (8) stress on the methods of development or patterns of organization; (9) emphasis on revision.

The data collected gave an accurate picture of the independent variables' (instructional modes) nature and effects on the dependent variables (growth and outcomes in the students' overall writing quality). The data were located among the population of freshman English students enrolled at Dalton College, a two-year institution in the University System of Georgia.

Data were collected from writing samples taken before and after instruction (Sanders & Littlefield, 1975), because most theorists believe that a direct sample is the best way to measure writing ability (Cooper, 1975, 1977; Diederich, 1974). Forty college students were selected from two freshman English classes, twenty subjects from each class; their writing samples were then analyzed by two English faculty members. One pretest essay was taken from each student at the beginning of each course before

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

instruction began, and one post-test essay was taken from each student at the end of each course after instruction. As guides to educational research point out, the pretest/post-test design is one effective way to determine the effects of an educational treatment (Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus, 1971; Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Cronbach, 1963).

The writing sessions were run identically for both the pretest and post-test. At the beginning of the course the students could choose one out of three topics on which to write. The students then had 60 minutes to plan, compose, revise, edit and correct their essays. At the end of that time the essays were collected. The same procedure was followed for the post-test essays at the end of the course instruction, except that the students could choose from three different topics on which to write.

In evaluating writing quality, a general-impression holistic rating session using expert readers--generally experienced English teachers trained to agree on certain global characteristics of the piece of writing--can produce acceptable reliability (Cooper, 1975, 1977; Diederich, 1974). For this study the raters were two college faculty members with Ph.D's in English. In addition to having several years of experience in teaching college composition, both raters had expertise and high agreement on holistic scoring for the Board of Regents' Essay Exam in the University System of Georgia. Both raters agreed to participate in the rating sessions, so there was a strong sense of willingness and cooperation from the onset.

The two faculty raters each read and scored a total of 80 randomly sorted essays, without knowing which were pretests or post-tests written by the 40 anonymous students in the study. Essay scores were based on the following scale: (1) lowest failing score; (2) minimally passing score; (3) clearly passing score; (4) highest passing score. The raters followed this scale and grading criteria used to score Regents' Testing Program essays in the University System of Georgia (See Appendix). For any essay on which the two raters disagreed by more than one point, a third independent rater scored the essay in question, and the two closest scores were used. The raw scores for each pretest and post-test set of essays were separately totaled and averaged to get the mean score. For the rate of agreement on the essay scores, the reliability between the raters was determined by calculating the "product-moment correlation" of their scores on the same essays. For essay scores of the 20 students receiving feedback during pre-writing (planning) and the writing process, the correlation coefficient was .82, indicating sufficient reliability. For the scores of the other 20 students receiving feedback after their essays had been graded, the correlation coefficient was .83, also sufficient reliability.

Statistical analysis on the dependent variables of the study was computed by using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) from the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS). "T" tests were done to determine whether there were significant differences between pretest and post-test scores on the essays. The confidence levels of statistical significance for 95% of the time

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

on the T tests were based on the following "p" values (significance of T): (1) * $p < .05$, significant; (2) ** $p < .01$, highly significant; (3) *** $p < .001$, very highly significant. The degrees of freedom (df) and standard deviations (SD) were also reported.

Results

In overall writing quality, each student wrote two essays on different topics, one pretest essay before instruction and one post-test essay following instruction. Each essay was scored holistically by two faculty raters on a scale of one (1-- poor/failing) to four (4— superior/passing). This procedure resulted in two scores on each pretest writing sample and two scores on each post-test writing sample for each student in the study. For statistical analysis, the two pretest scores on each student's essay were combined, and the two post-test scores were combined, resulting in the lowest possible score of two (failing) and the highest possible score of eight (superior quality) on each writing occasion.

The group of students, whose professor had informally intervened with feedback during the students' planning and composing processes, usually on the computer, had a mean score of 2.75 on the pretest essay and a mean score of 4.75 on the post-test essay, a positive change of 2.0. The statistical analysis of variance indicated that the difference between the pretest and post-test scores was very highly significant ($T = 8.31$; $df = 19$; $p = .0001$, *** $p < .001$; $SD = 1.076$) in the main effect for this

method of teaching freshman composition. These students' pass rate was 85% on the post-test essays, which also served as the final essay exam in the class: Seventeen students passed, but three students failed.

The other group of students, whose professor conferenced with each of them after he had graded each of their essays, had a mean score of 2.6 on the pretest essay and a mean score of 4.1 on the post-test essay, a positive change of 1.5. The statistical analysis indicated that the difference between the pretest and posttest scores was also very highly significant ($T = 11.05$; $df = 19$; $p = .0001$, *** $p < .001$; $SD = .607$) in the main effect for this method of teaching freshman composition. These students' pass rate was 95% on the post-test essays, also serving as the final essay exam in the course: Nineteen students passed, but one student failed.

However, statistical analysis indicated no significant difference between each comparison group's outcomes on the posttest scores, a mean difference of only 0.5 ($T = 2.04$; $df = 19$; $p = .055$, $p > .05$; $SD = 1.424$); nevertheless, this result does show slightly more growth in overall writing quality for the students getting feedback on their writing during their planning and composing process, approaching statistical significance, than the students receiving feedback on their writing in conferences with the professor after he had graded the essays.

Growth in writing quality is illustrated in the following pretest and post-test writing samples of students in this study:

Sixty-Minute Impromptu Pretest Essay of Student Number One

Topic: What was the most important event of your life? Discuss why this event was so important.

The most important event in my life was when I became a mother for the first time. I had always wanted a family and a happy home to raise it in.

The birth of my daughter gave me a sense of worth and fulfillment. My maternal instincts were strong and I wanted to share the love that I had inside with someone else. It was easy to love this beautiful, well-behaved baby.

Her birth also brought with it a much needed maturation process. I had a lot of growing up to do at age eighteen but I stood up well to the challenge. The trials of my early parenting days made me who I am today.

Becoming a parent also helped me to understand and respect my parents for every little thing they did. I live in wonder every day at everything they had to put up with.

Having my first child made every day of my life ever since special. I am a better person and a better christian, all from the love between a child and a mother.

This pretest essay received a combined score of "three" mainly because the writer did not develop each body paragraph with sufficient concrete examples and specific details for support.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Sixty-Minute Impromptu Post-Test Essay of Student Number One

Topic: In this age of efficiency and machine-made goods, why do you think people still enjoy going to craft fairs and purchasing handmade items?

In the age of efficiency and machine-made goods people still enjoy going to craft fairs and buying handmade goods. It is my opinion that people enjoy attending craft fairs for a variety of reasons. Most people spent their daily lives surrounded by computers, machines and automobiles, but when they attend a country fair they are surrounded by a less stressful, comfortable atmosphere, by people who take pride in their achievements and goods, and by things that are less harsh and plastic than in their everyday lives.

The theme of a country fair is based on country living. Country living is generally busy yet refreshing. People who attend country fairs usually enjoy the quiet atmosphere and friendly people. Meandering around shops and stages on a warm Spring day can be very relaxing to any hard working person. I think that just being out in the fresh air away from the noise of the city is a large part of the country fair's appeal.

Aside from the peaceful atmosphere, people enjoy seeing and buying what other people make. There is no substitute for a well-made, hand crafted item. Unlike store-bought goods, there is a special kind of pride in displaying hand-made goods. It is unfortunate that things which were once a

source of pride for the handcrafter are now mass produced and are never given a second thought. Handmade goods are fashioned and made with special care and are often personalized for the buyer. Everything sold at a country fair is sealed with a personal touch from the creator.

Finally, there is a certain pliability to the goods bought and sold at craft fairs. Whether it is a quilt or a doll or even a jar of jelly, there is a flexability to it. Fair bought items are created for pleasure and designed for longevity. There is a rigidity to shopping in a store that cannot be experienced at the country fair.

In conclusion, I believe people enjoy country fairs because they enjoy escaping from the modern world for a while. Attending a craft show or country fair is like stepping back in time, and most people need a break from modern reality. If a person enjoys a quiet, relaxed atmosphere, seeks quality handmade goods, and wants less rigid, personalized items, he or she would certainly enjoy attending a country fair.

This post-test essay received a combined score of "seven" because it was well developed with a sufficient number of concrete examples and specific details for support, well organized, and correctly written for the most part with just minimal errors.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Sixty-Minute Impromptu Pretest Essay of Student Number Two

Topic: What was the most important event of your life? Discuss why this event was so important.

The most important event in my life was the day my younger sister was born. I was an only child for eleven years before I found out that I was going to have a sibling. She shows an unconditional love toward me that only a sister can show. When she was born it was if a hole had been filled in my life. Not only am I her big sister, but I am her role model as well.

It is rare that someone in this world will experience a love that is given freely. Most people expect something in return, but my sister does not. She loves me for who I am and does not ask for anything more than I offer to her. Her love is a precious gift that I would never trade for anything in this world.

I had always longed for a sibling in my life. I wanted someone to share special events and secrets with. My sister may be eleven years younger than I, but she always seems to be there for me. Just her presence can make an ugly situation somehow better.

I now have someone in my life who I can share my special skills and abilities with. I have been involved in many activities, such as softball, ballet, and cheerleading, and now I will be able to pass on the skills that God gave to me. Not only will I be able to pass on my abilities, but

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

I also can pass on my better traits such as my attitude, outgoing personality, and ability to see the importance of family in my life and hers.

My younger sister means the world to me; I cannot imagine my life without her. She fills my life and heart with love and devotion that would be an empty space if it were not for her.

This pretest essay received a combined score of "four" because the body paragraphs lacked sufficient development of concrete examples and specific details, even though the writer did show some evidence of a few examples. In addition, the essay lacked clarity in discussing the specific event on the birth of the writer's sister, the main discourse topic on which the readers expected the writer to focus.

Sixty-Minute Impromptu Post-Test Essay of Student Number Two

Topic: Shopping by television is no longer a dream; QVC, the shopping channel, offers merchandise day and night. Do you or would you like to shop by television? Why or why not?

Shopping by television was once only an idea in someone's mind. Today it is a reality. Just about anything can be ordered from QVC by simply picking up the telephone and dialing a number. However, this process may not be as simple as calling the operator who is waiting for my call. There are often complications that may arise. I would not

like to shop by television because prices are higher, because one does not see the merchandise before it is bought, and because there may be problems that arise while the merchandise is being mailed.

Shopping by television can be very costly. There are excess costs that are added to the original cost of the item that is ordered. One of these added costs is a shipping and handling charge. Anytime merchandise is delivered through the mail a certain amount of money is added to the original cost in order to protect the item. Also, the television station may raise the price as well. The majority of the people who order items from television do not check other places to compare prices. Therefore, one does not know if one could buy the same product for a cheaper price. Also, taxes may be higher in the area from which the television show is broadcasted. Sales tax is added to everything people buy in today's society. However, the rates are different almost everywhere one travels, so taxes may cause the price to increase as well. Price is not the only point, though.

I always like to see the merchandise before I purchase it. Unfortunately, if I order an item from QVC I am not able to see it in person. Television can be deceiving. An item may look good on camera, but the same item may not be as appealing in person. Color may be different, or the item may be the wrong size once it arrives. Also, when one receives the item, flaws may show up that were not shown during the presentation on television. Some merchandise is

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

not returnable. This is another reason I like to see something before I purchase it. Once the product is received I may decide that the item is not what I wanted to begin with. However, if it is not returnable, I would be stuck with the item.

The merchandise that I order may be in good condition when it is first mailed, but problems may arise before the merchandise reaches my house. If the product is not packaged correctly, the item may get broken. If I order a picture frame, the glass may be broken before I receive it. Special precautions must be taken, such as protective packaging and special handling to prevent this from occurring. Another problem that may arise is that my merchandise may get lost in the mail. There is no way that I could ever prove that I never received the item, so there is a possibility that I would have to pay for merchandise I never got. The product may not get lost or broken, but it may get damaged in some other way. There is also no way to show that I did not damage the product, so I would be stuck with a damaged item that may or may not work.

Some people believe that television shopping is simple and easy. However, things aren't always as they seem, and shopping by television is more complicated than just dialing a number and placing an order. I would not like to shop by television because prices are higher, because the product may not be what I wanted, and because complications may show up when the merchandise is mailed.

This post-test essay received a combined score of "seven" because the body paragraphs were well developed with a sufficient number of concrete examples and specific details for support, well organized, clearly written with sharp focus on the discourse topic, and correctly written for the most part.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, the following discussion presents the conclusions and implications for research and teaching college freshman composition. One important question this study sought to answer was whether feedback on students' writing during planning and the composing process or feedback during conferences on the final, graded writing product made any significant difference statistically in the students' growth and outcomes on overall writing quality. Based on the evidence in this study, the answer is yes. The students of both comparison groups demonstrated statistically significant growth 95% of the time in overall writing quality between the pretest essays and the post-test essays. This highly significant growth suggested that these students benefitted from their respective professors' constructive feedback on their writing while conferencing individually with them before, during, and even after their composing process for producing a final written product, although the one group of students did have slightly higher growth and outcomes (0.5), approaching statistical significance, when they received feedback during planning and composing their essays. However, since there was no significant difference 95% of the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

time between the two groups' outcomes on the post-test scores, it made no difference for both groups of students in their writing quality at what time in their composing process they received feedback, no matter if it was before, during, or after writing.

In addition, this growth implied that these students further benefitted even from limited planning, outlining, composing, revising, editing/correcting each of ten essays in the course after having class discussion on some standard models of the five-paragraph essay in narration/description, exposition, and argument/persuasion. These findings further suggested that the students developed the necessary organizational schemata, or outlined plans, to write such an impromptu essay successfully in 60 minutes. The students' frequent engagement in the composing process, coupled with feedback, gave them the essential practice to write a passing essay for an audience of two - three English faculty reading and scoring each post-test, which served as the final essay exam in each course.

In closing, the findings from this study seem to support the conclusion that the audience's feedback on students' writing--before, during, or even after the composing process--makes a significant difference in the students' growth and outcomes on the overall quality of the written product they produce. In fact, even feedback provided after a particular essay is written and graded still helps the student anticipate the writing objectives of the next essay, serving as a form of intervention for all subsequent essays in the global composing process throughout the whole course, from the pretest to the post-test; the data further

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

support the recursive benefits of the composing process, along with audience response. This study also suggests numerous variables or features in writing instruction for further research to help educators realize that even in our high-tech academic world of computers, word processors, desk-top publishing and the world-wide web, "up close and personal" for successful communication still rules.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

References

Applebee, A. N. (1981). *Writing in the secondary school: English and the content areas. NCTE research report no. 21.* Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Beach, R.(1979). "The effects of between-draft teacher evaluation versus student self evaluation on high school students' rough drafts." *Research in the Teaching of English, 13,* 111-119.

Bloom, B. S., Hastings, J. L., & Madaus, C. F. (1971). *Handbook on formative and summative evaluation of student learning.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Campbell, D. T., & Stanley, J. C. (1963). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research.* Chicago: Rand McNally.

Clifford, J. (1981). Composing in stages: The effects of a collaborative pedagogy. *Research in the Teaching of English, 15,* 37-53.

Cooper, C. R. (1975). Research roundup--Measuring growth in writing. *English Journal, 64*(7), 111-120.

Cooper, C. R. (1977). Holistic evaluation of writing. In C. R. Cooper & L. Odell (Eds.), *Evaluating Writing* (pp. 3-32). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Cronbach, L. J. (1963). Evaluation for course improvement. *Texas College Record, 64,* 672-683.

Diederich, P. B. (1974). *Measuring growth in English.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Hillocks, G., Jr. (1982). The interaction of instructor, teacher comment, and revision in teaching the composing process. *Research in the Teaching of English, 16,* 261-278.

Hillocks, G., Jr. (1986). *Research on written composition: New directions for teaching.* Urbana, IL: National Conference on Research in English.

Patthey-Chavez, G. G., & Ferris, D. R. (1997). Writing conferences and the weaving of multi-voiced texts in college composition. *Research in the Teaching of English, 31,* 51-90.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Sanders, S. E., & Littlefield, J. H. (1975). Perhaps test essays can reflect significant improvement in freshman composition: Report on a successful attempt. *Research in the Teaching of English, 9,* 145-153.

Stein, N. L. (1984). Critical issues in the development of literacy education: Toward a theory of learning and instruction. *American Journal of Education, 93,* 171-199.

Straub, R. (1997). Students' reactions to teacher comments: An exploratory study. *Research in the Teaching of English, 31,* 91-119.

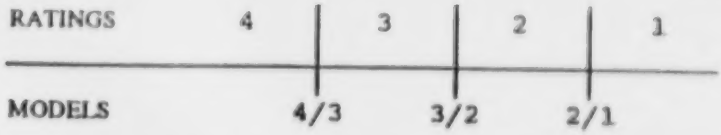
BEST COPY AVAILABLE

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCORING REGENTS' TESTING PROGRAM ESSAYS

DESCRIPTION OF ESSAY SCORING PROCEDURE

Raters should read each essay quickly to gain a general impression of its quality in relation to the model essays and assign a rating based on that comparison. This approach, holistic rating, contrasts with the analytic grading commonly used in essay evaluation, but evidence indicates that holistic rating is much faster and produces more uniform results.

The essays are rated on a four-point scale in which "1" is the lowest score and "4" is the highest score. The model essays represent borderline cases; each essay to be rated must, by definition, fall above or below a model.



One model essay represents each dividing line. An essay better than the "2/1" model and worse than the "3/2" model would be rated "2." An essay worse than the "2/1" model becomes "1." An essay better than the "4/3" model becomes "4."

Note carefully that raters should compare the essays they read with the models. They should not rate in terms of their usual grading standards or some abstract standard. They should not associate the ratings with the traditional grades A, B, C, D, F.

The testing subcommittee of the University System Academic Committee on English attempts to choose models by using the following definitions of competency, although it realizes that these definitions are by no means exhaustive.

4: The "4" essay has a clear central idea that relates directly to the assigned topic. The essay has a clear organizational plan. The major points are developed logically and are supported with concrete, specific evidence or details that arouse the reader's interest. The essay reveals the writer's ability to select effective, appropriate words and phrases; to write varied, sophisticated sentences; to make careful use of effective transitional devices; and to maintain a consistent, appropriate tone. The essay is essentially free from mechanical errors, it contains no serious grammatical errors, and the ideas are expressed freshly and vividly.

3: The "3" essay has a clear central idea that relates directly to the assigned topic. It contains most of the qualities of good writing itemized above. The essay generally differs from a "4" in that it shows definite competence, but lacks distinction. The examples and details are pertinent, but may not be particularly vivid or sharply observed; the word choice is generally accurate, but seldom -- if ever -- really felicitous. The writer adopts an appropriate, consistent tone. The essay may contain a few errors in grammar and mechanics.

PASSING 2: The "2" essay meets only the basic criteria, and those in a minimal way. The essay has a central idea related directly to the assigned topic and presented with sufficient clarity that the reader is aware of the writer's purpose. The organization is clear enough for the reader to perceive the writer's plan. The paragraphs coherently present some evidence or details to substantiate the points. The writer uses ordinary, everyday words accurately and idiomatically and generally avoids both the monotony created by series of choppy, simple sentences and the incoherence caused by long, tangled sentences. Although the essay may contain a few serious grammatical errors and several mechanical errors, they are not of sufficient severity or frequency to obscure the sense of what the writer is saying.

FAILING 1: The "1" essay has any one of the following problems to an extraordinary degree or it has several to a limited degree: it lacks a central idea; it lacks a clear organizational plan; it does not develop its points or develops them in a repetitious, incoherent, or illogical way; it does not relate directly to the assigned topic; it contains several serious grammatical errors; it contains numerous mechanical errors; ordinary, everyday words are used inaccurately and unidiomatically; it contains a limited vocabulary so that the words chosen frequently do not serve the writer's purpose; syntax is frequently rudimentary or tangled; or the essay is so brief that the rater cannot make an accurate judgement of the writer's ability.